





LECTURE GEMS

By H. Spillman Riggs.

SOUVENIR EDITION.



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1897.

MUNCIE, INDIANA:
CENTRAL PRINTING CO.
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PART I.

MUSICAL FITS AND MISFITS.

HEN man, in his primeval purity and moral beauty abode in Eden's delightful fields, where the soft and gentle zephyrs played among the branches of the ever verdant trees, and the softly rippling rill played mellow accompaniment to the sweet-voiced birds of Paradise as they sang their morning song in the tree-tops overhead; where the cattle waded breast deep in pastures green, and all nature basked in the sunshine of God's love, I doubt not there were often heard in rich and mellow tones, the voices of the unpolluted pair, as they poured pure and sweet upon the hallowed atmosphere their songs of praise and joy.

There were no weird and minor chords in Eden—no sad and plaintive strains—no harsh and grating sounds—no unharmonious tones—for God had placed but love within the human breast, and hearts attuned to love sang forth His praise. Not until the Serpent sang his evil song to mother Eve, and by his lying words tempted her to sin against her God was discord ever heard in these Elysian fields. It was the voice of night, singing a sad requiem over the bleeding body of vanquished day; it was the hoarse shout of the once degraded and defeated, but now alas, victorious monster, the Prince of Darkness and the Fiend of Hell, as he gloats over the ruin he has wrought and mocks God because of the desolation of His favored creatures.

The birds sang just as sweetly in the tree tops over head, the rippling rill still played its mellow accompaniment, cattle still waded breast-deep in pastures green and all nature seemed still to bask in the sunshine of Divine love; but man, out of touch, out of harmony, out of accord with

all that was purest and holiest and most Divine, sang only discord, sad and plaintive—nor has the discord ever ceased.

* * * *

Every civilized nation has its "National Hymn." In our beloved land we sing:

"My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet Land of Liberty,
Of thee I sing."

With such a song as this to be the expression of our national sentiment, is it any wonder that God has blessed us by making us the mighty nation that we are? With such a song as this to open up its patriotic strains on the cold shores of Maine, where the stormy Atlantic beats and dashes against the rock-bound coast, to roll on over our densely peopled cities of the east, mingling its stirring tones with the hum of industry and the whirr of machinery in our broad western states, gathering new inspiration from the broad bosom of the mighty Mississippi, rolling on with ever swelling grandeur across the undulating prairies and

plains, striking with majestic force against the lofty Rockies, only to surmount their highest peaks, and at last in sweetest melody to settle down upon the sun-kissed shores of California, where the beautiful Pacific laps and licks the sands—with such a song as *this* to be the expression of our national sentiment we can but prosper and be blessed.

* * * *

I was recently asked by a gentleman in Indiana to tell him the prettiest song I ever heard. In the following lines I gave him my answer:

THE PRETTIEST SONG.

Prettiest song I ever heard?—
Well now, lemme think a spell;
Fer I've heard o' heap o' songs,
An' it's kind o' hard to tell
Which one struck me best.
But I think a little song
That I heard a mother wunst
Singin' to her little child,
As she clasped him to her breast,
Wus perhaps the prettiest.—
Her voice was gentle, soft and mild,
Full o' sweetness an' content,

As she rocked him to an' fro—
As she rocked an' sung so low,
Till the little fellow went
Off to sleep an' rest.
Yes, I've heard a heap o' songs,
All the latest an' the best,
But that mother's lullaby
Wus, I'm sure, the prettiest.
An' I've often wished since then
That I wus a little child,
Clasped so clost to mother's breast,
Sheltered there from storms so wild—
Folded in her lovin' arms,
Soothed from every childish fear,
Sleepin' as she'd sweetly sing:
"Rest my child, your mother's near."

* * * *

The church music of our ancestors was about as dry and unattractive as a great deal of the rest of their religion. In those good old days of long ago, when our grandfathers were so particular that they watered their horses twice on Saturday so as not to have to water them on Sunday, and when our dear old grandmothers boiled the teakettle on Saturday and wrapped it up in a blanket to keep it warm over Sunday, people were very par-

ticular as to what they sang in the churches. A song to be considered religious must be a very long one, seventeen stanzas was not too long; it must be a very melancholy sentiment dealing with death and the judgment, and the sombre view of life; then too, it must be a very slow song, and last of all it must be executed with that peculiar nasal twang which characterized much, if not all, of the church music of the olden time.

Imagine good old deacon Longface leading the congregation in

"Sweet prospects, sweet birds and sweet flowers
Have all lost their sweetness to me."

I have been trying to live a Christian life for fifteen years and have never yet been able to see the fitness of that old song. I am not yet able to figure out why the sweet prospects of life should be less sweet since I have come to see Christ in them; nor why the sweet-voiced birds of the forest should sing any the less sweetly to me since I have come to understand that God has attuned their voices to sing his praise; nor why the lovely

flower of the garden should emit any less fragrant perfume to my nostrils now that I have learned that God has put their fragrance there. But that old song was in perfect keeping with the spirit of the religion of those days, when it was believed that in order to appear a Christian one must go about with his chin down upon his shirt front looking as sad as though he had just buried his dearest friend. Then too, dear old sister Screech would sing:

"When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
I'll bid farewell to every fear
And wipe my weeping eyes."

But I am glad to say that in this day and age the congregation does not have to worry about the singing in the church, for we have the modern choir which takes all that responsibility off of our hands. God bless the modern choir! and, I might add, God pity the congregation that must listen to its singing!

* * * *

It is a "Musical Misfit" for the choir
to start up

"Pull for the shore, sailor,"

just as the minister is starting up out of
the baptismal waters with a newly im-
mersed convert.

It is a "Musical Misfit" for the church
choir to sing to a body of visiting clergy-
men as they file down the isle,

"Come ye sinners, poor and needy."

It is a "Musical Misfit" to sing

"I long to be an angel

And with the angels stand,"

and then send for the doctor the first time
you have a stitch in your back.

DON'T LET YOUR SONG DIE DOWN.

No matter how the winds may blow,

Or how life's storms may rage;

No matter how affairs may go,

In youth or life's old age;

If this advice you all will heed,

Your sorrows you can drown:—

When you are sad, or in sore need,

Don't Let Your Song Die Down.

I know we all have cloudy days,

That times of darkness come;

I know that life has thorny ways,

That only cares have some;
But still I tell you as a friend,
E'en tho' the whole world frown,
Keep heart, and hope until the end,
Don't Let Your Song Die Down.

The world will wag when we are gone,
Our life is short at best;
Just let the brood of toil plod on,
And let the merry jest.
But you, my friends, wher'er you live,
In country-side or town—
Heed this advice I freely give,
Don't Let Your Song Die Down.

Behind the clouds the sun still shines,
Tho' dark the day may seem;
A silver sheet the cloud-rift lines,
And all may see the gleam—
If this advice you'll closely heed:
E'en tho' the whole world frown,
No matter how your heart may bleed,
Don't Let Your Song Die Down.

What if the tune be sad and low,
Or bright and glad and gay?
What if the time be quick or slow,
If it drive dull care away?
Take this advice, you'll find it worth
More than a kingly crown—
More than a half of all the earth,
Don't Let Your Song Die Down.

* * * *

PART II.



THE FUNNY SIDE OF LIFE.



IT TAKES some joy and some sorrow, some sunshine and some shadow, some ups and some downs, some success and some failure to enable us to arrive at a fair estimate of life and all its advantages, privileges, pleasures and responsibilities.

Life is a great problem.

Three unanswered and answerable questions constantly confront us: Where are we? What are we? And, whither do we go?

The scientist probes into the mysteries of the past seeking, all in vain, for an answer to the first; the sage and the philosopher strive in vain to find an answer to

the second; the skeptic and the theologian endeavor in vain to find an answer to the third; and while they puzzle their brains over these mysteries, Life, with all its joys and sorrows is flowing on like a majestic stream, whose source has never yet been found, and whose terminus is lost in the dark confines of some unexplored cavern.

* * * *

I have seen the poor laborer toiling homeward after a long day's work, with scarcely enough money in his pocket to pay for his night's lodging, and I have sympathized with him; I have seen the cripple limping along upon his crutches and experiencing pain at every step, and I have sympathized with him; I have seen the lonely old bachelor or maid, wearing out a lonely existence in single wretchedness and I have pitied them; I have seen the heart broken husband turn away from the grave where all his hopes lay buried and I have wept with him; but I have never seen any person so deserving of pity as that one who sees only the dark side of

life and who never experiences the benefit of a rousing laugh.

It is as abnormal for us not to laugh as it is for us not to weep. The same God who made the organs of tears made the organs of laughter.

Laugh then, ye sons of men, and let the low mutterings of thunder which come from your clouds of sadness, be drowned in the gladsome peals of laughter that are born of the rainbow of hope and the sunshine of love!

* * * *

Man, pendulum like, swings between the two extremes of laughter and tears. Today, we find him on some mountain-top of prosperity, exultant because of victory; tomorrow, we find him in some valley of adversity, despondent because of defeat. Today the wedding bells, tomorrow the funeral knell; today, the song of joy, tomorrow the wail of grief; and thus it is that the ever varying experiences of life follow one another up and down the pathway in which we journey, in quick and rapid succession.

Fun is not wickedness. Convicts in a prison or penitentiary usually wear a surly, churlish look on their countenances—not because they are convicts, necessarily, but they are the rather convicts because their faces only indicate their true character.

The man who would rather tie a tin can, loaded with fire-crackers, to a dog's tail than to make a kite for a little boy; the man who would rather patronize a stinking, smoky, saw-dust floored, beer saloon than a church social; the man who can see humor only in the vulgar and libidinous, is not necessarily a fun-loving man; he is only giving vent to the brutish part of his makeup.

The one whose heart is free from guile and whose mind is free from evil, who has let the bright sunshine of love and gladness into his life, will find pleasure in innocence and fun in purity.

* * * *

Two little children were out at play. One was six years old, and the other four.

They quarreled. "Yes," said the old-

er tot, "I'm six years old, and you 'aint but four, and when I was four you wasn't but two, and when I was two you wasn't nothin' but jist—jist—nothin' but jist *dust*, so you wasn't!"

"Yes," said the little one spitefully, "I was but dist *dust*, so I was, an' if it had 'a' been a *wet* spell an' I'd 'a' been 'a' mud-puddle, I'd 'a' splashed *you* good, so I would!"

I sat in an elegant city home one evening sometime since. The lady of the house had left me for a little time in charge of Mary, the five-year-old daughter. We sat looking out upon the street, and presently a plain, honest John farmer went strolling by.

"Do you see that man?" said Mary.

"Yes," I replied.

"Did God make him?"

"Yes, little Innocence, why do you ask?"

"O, 'cause," came the answer, "I was jes' a-thinkin', if *God* made him, he made his breeches mighty short."

A little boy once asked me if God made

Dudes. Now my friends, I have always had a most profound reverence for the Diety, and I confess that I hesitated for a moment to lay anything of that sort at God's door; but thinking that perhaps God had made all things, good, bad and indifferent, and that the dude belonged to the latter class, I finally gave the child an affirmative answer, upon receiving which the little rogue looked up into my face and said with pungent sarcasm, "O well I guess God likes a joke about as well as anyone else."

When I taught school there were only four genders: masculine, feminine, common and neuter; now there are six: masculine, feminine, common, neuter, *dude* and *bloomer*.



PART III.



MAMMOTH CAVE;

OR

FUN UNDERGROUND.



HE traveler upon entering the greatest cave on earth feels a sense of awe such as he has never felt before. He is entering another world a mysterious realm, the existence of which no human being can account for. He is tramping over holy ground—holy because he realizes that nothing but a Divine power could have wrought such a miracle.

He tramps where statesmen of many countries have tramped; he stands where

poets, singers, actors and celebrities of every line have stood.

He can almost imagine himself hearing again the sweet voice of Jenny Lind as she sings "The Last Rose of Summer;" he hears the thrilling voice of Booth as he interprets Shakespeare there; he trembles with delight at the tremolo of Ole Bull's violin; he can imagine himself surrounded by hundreds of shadowy forms of dusky workmen as they labor in the "salt petre mines" as they did there in 1812-15; he hears again the voice of the clergyman as he reads the marriage service before the bridal altar in "Bridal Chamber;" in short, such a wave of feeling overcomes the traveler that he forgets the outer world above him and revels in the mysteries of the present, surrounded by the wierdest scenery and most grotesque environment.

It was my good fortune to visit the Mammoth Cave as the honored guest of the management, and to have as my special escort, Bishop, the celebrated

guide who is thoroughly versed in the lore of the wonderful place.

I shall never forget the trip. Thirty miles of climbing, crawling, sliding and decending!

If you could have seen me in some of my awkward positions you would never have taken me for the lecturer you see before you.

How I enjoyed my ride on "Echo River," that river that for three quarters of a mile flows through the cave, coming, no one knows whence and going no one knows whither.

I caught a little blind fish in the river. Of what use would eyes have been to it in Mammoth Cave? Eternal darkness reigns there, our only light being furnished by two little oil torches which we carried. I recognized in the blindness of these little fishes an inexorable law of nature—when God gives to us any faculty which we do not or cannot use, it becomes blunted and is finally taken away. Moral: Cultivate every faculty for good with which we are endowed.

I stood for a moment on the verge of the bottomless pit, and thought of that other "bottomless pit" (?) of which the preachers tell us.

I heard the dashing, frothing, foaming water in the bottom of the maelstrom; I kissed the "Blarney Stone" and drank water from a stone bowl from which the sweet Jennie Lind drank when she visited the cave many years ago.

But in all my life I never had such an experience as I had in the "Star Chamber." There the guide deprived me of my torch and in total darkness he left me. For fifteen minutes (it seemed an age) I sat there, hearing no sound save the beatings of my own heart.

Presently, far beneath in some under cavern, I heard the lowing of cattle, the neighing of horses, the bleating of sheep and the crowing of roosters. Daylight began to dawn, and in a few minutes the full orb'd sun shown in the eastern sky.

The firey ball shone with replendent beauty, making the cavern light as day. Was I dreaming? Where was I? Had

some necromancer played a trick on me?

The illusion was soon dispelled however, for stepping out of the ball of fire came my guide!

He had simply dropped down through a hole in the floor of the cave and traversing an underground passage had burned a red calcium light in such a manner as to cause its rays to shine through a circular opening at my right. The familiar barnyard sounds he had skillfully produced himself. When we at last emerged from the Mammoth Cave, it seemed that I had been gone an age, when in truth I had been underground but twelve short hours:

MAMMOTH CAVE.

Dark and dismal, cold and cheerless,
Silent as the lonely grave,
Full of deep and awful mystery,
Is Kentucky's Mammoth Cave.

Mighty domes with starry ceilings,
Deepest pits so damp and drear,
Fill the heart of the explorer
With a nameless dread and fear.

Miles and miles of death-like stillness,
Miles and miles of treacherous way,
Far below the earth's green surface,
Far removed from light of day.

Who can solve the awful mystery
Which surrounds this cavern grand?
Who can tell us how it came here?
No one; for by God 'twas planned.

In the world's remotest ages
Long ere history began
To be carved on stony pages,
By the skillful hand of man.

In the pre-historic centuries,
Long before in Eden's bowers,
Adam and his fair companion
Plucked the fairest, richest flowers;

In the days when God was rearing
Mountains high from out the seas;
In the days when barren deserts
Were made to grow the giant trees;

In the days when mighty earthquakes,
With convulsive heaves upheaved
Rock-ribbed hills in pleasant valleys,
Then it was this cave appeared.

Why 'twas placed there, who can answer?
Were there demons in those days,
Who must needs to be imprisoned
For mischievous, wicked ways?

Or was this cave a mighty storehouse,
Where were kept the precious ores,
Hidden until God should need them
To transplant them to all shores?

Or was this cave some council chamber,
Where in earth's glad, happy morn,
Plots and plans for man's destruction
Were conceived and then hell-born?

Or did God construct this cavern
That awe-stricken men might shout,
"How marvelous are Thy works, O God!
And Thy ways past finding out!"

